

**What Is Claimed Is:**

1. A protective cover for protection of agricultural products, said protective cover sized to permit said cover to be positioned generally about an associated agricultural product, said cover comprising a fibrous nonwoven fabric formed from fibrous and/or filamentary elements, said fibrous nonwoven fabric including a portion exhibiting the ability to modify the ripening of the agricultural product prior to harvesting, while retarding passage of dust and insects.

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2. A protective cover for protection of agricultural products in accordance with claim 1, wherein:

10 said fibrous nonwoven fabric comprises fibrous material selected from the group consisting of thermoplastic polymers, thermoset polymers, natural fibers, and combinations thereof.

15 3. A protective cover for agricultural products in accordance with claim 1, wherein:

said fibrous nonwoven fabric has basis weight from about 10 to 100 gr/m<sup>2</sup>.

20 4. A protective cover for agricultural products in accordance with claim 1, wherein:

said fibrous nonwoven fabric comprises polymeric staple length fibers.

5. A protective cover for agricultural products in accordance with claim 1, wherein:

said fibrous nonwoven fabric comprises spunbond polymeric material.

25 6. A protective cover for agricultural products in accordance with claim 1, wherein:

said cover comprises at least one piece of said fibrous nonwoven fabric, said piece of fibrous nonwoven fabric having at least one edge.

7. A protective cover for agricultural products in accordance with claim 1, wherein:

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said piece of fibrous nonwoven fabric having at least one edge further comprises an affixing means selected from the group consisting of adhesives and adhesive tapes, hook and loop fasteners, staples, zippers, snaps, buttons, and ties.

5 8. A protective cover for agricultural products in accordance with claim 6, wherein:

said cover comprises at least one means for affixing the protective cover about an agricultural product.

10 9. A protective cover for agricultural products in accordance with claim 1, wherein:

said cover comprises at least one piece of said fibrous nonwoven fabric, with at least one seam joining edge portions of said piece of fabric, said seam being formed by at least one of heat-bonding, adhesive bonding, and sewing.

15 10. A protective cover for agricultural products in accordance with claim 1, wherein:

said fibrous nonwoven fabric further comprises a reinforcing scrim.

11. A protective cover for agricultural products in accordance with claim 1, wherein:

said cover further comprises a porous polymeric film layer.

20 12. A protective cover for agricultural products in accordance with claim 1, wherein:

said fibrous nonwoven fabric comprise polymeric material incorporating one or more protection-enhancing agents selected from the group consisting of insecticidal, fungicidal, algaecidal, decay-inhibiting, volatile ripening chemistry absorbent, UV-protective, and pigmenting agents.

25 13. A protective cover for agricultural products in accordance with claim 10, wherein:

said polymeric material is a thermoplastic polymer, and said protection enhancing agent is a melt-additive in said polymer.

14. A protective cover for agricultural products in accordance with  
claim 10, wherein:

5 said protection enhancing agent comprises a fiber surface treatment for  
said fibrous nonwoven fabric.

15. A protective cover for agricultural products in accordance with  
claim 10, wherein:

10 said protection enhancing agent comprises a topical treatment applied to  
said nonwoven fabric.

15 16. A protective cover for protection of agricultural products, said  
protective cover sized to permit said cover to be positioned generally about an  
associated agricultural product, said cover comprising a fibrous nonwoven  
fabric formed from fibrous and/or filamentary elements, said fibrous  
nonwoven fabric exhibiting the ability to modify the ripening of the  
agricultural product prior to harvesting while retarding passage of dust and  
insects, said modification of the ripening of the agricultural product occurring  
by alteration of the light transmittance in at least one region of the protective  
cover.

20 17. A protective cover for protection of agricultural products, said  
protective cover sized to permit said cover to be positioned generally about an  
associated agricultural product, said cover comprising a fibrous nonwoven  
fabric formed from fibrous and/or filamentary elements, said fibrous  
nonwoven fabric exhibiting the ability to modify the ripening of the  
agricultural product prior to harvesting while retarding passage of dust and  
insects, said modification of the ripening of the agricultural product occurring  
25 by alteration of the venting, sequestering, or transference of volatile ripening  
chemistries in at least one region of the protective cover.

18. A method of protecting agricultural products, comprising the  
steps of:

30 providing at least one piece of nonwoven fabric formed from fibrous  
and/or filamentary element;

forming a sheet from said nonwoven fabric having a finite length and width;

modifying at least one region of the nonwoven fabric so as to have an altered level of light transmittance; and

5       positioning said protective cover generally about an agricultural product to alter the ripening of the agricultural product prior to harvesting and protecting the product from dust and/or insects.

19.      A method of protecting agricultural products in accordance with claim 18, wherein:

10        said nonwoven fabric comprises heat-bonded, polymeric staple length fibers.

20.      A method of protecting agricultural products in accordance with claim 18, wherein:

15        said nonwoven fabric comprises hydroentangled staple length fibers.

21.      A method of protecting agricultural products in accordance with claim 18, wherein:

18        said nonwoven fabric comprises adhesive-bonded fibrous material.

22.      A method of protecting agricultural products in accordance with claim 18, wherein:

20        said nonwoven fabric comprises substantially continuous polymeric filaments.

23.      A method of protecting agricultural products, comprising the steps of:

25        providing at least one piece of nonwoven fabric formed from fibrous and/or filamentary element;

      modifying at least one region of the nonwoven fabric so as to have an altered level of light transmittance;

      forming a tube from said nonwoven fabric by joining together of edge portions thereof;

30        cutting said tube to a selected length to form a protective cover; and

positioning said protective cover generally about an agricultural product to protect the product from dust and/or insects.

24. A method of protecting agricultural products in accordance with claim 14, wherein:

5            said tube-forming step includes joining edge portions of said piece of nonwoven fabric by at least one of heat bonding, adhesive bonding, and sewing.

25. A method of protecting agricultural products, comprising the steps of:

10            providing at least one piece of nonwoven fabric formed from fibrous and/or filamentary element;

              forming a sheet from said nonwoven fabric having a finite length and width;

15            modifying at least one region of the nonwoven fabric so as to have an altered level of venting, sequestering, or transference of volatile ripening chemistries; and

              positioning said protective cover generally about an agricultural product to alter the ripening of the agricultural product prior to harvesting and protecting the product from dust and/or insects.

20            26. A method of protecting agricultural products, comprising the steps of:

              providing at least one piece of nonwoven fabric formed from fibrous and/or filamentary element;

              modifying at least one region of the nonwoven fabric so as to have an altered level of venting, sequestering, or transference of volatile ripening chemistries;

              forming a tube from said nonwoven fabric by joining together of edge portions thereof;

              cutting said tube to a selected length to form a protective cover; and

positioning said protective cover generally about an agricultural product to protect the product from dust and/or insects.